**Skunk Hour**

By Robert Lowell

**(For Elizabeth Bishop)**

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| 6Nautilus Island's hermit heiress still lives through winter in her Spartan cottage; her sheep still graze above the sea. Her son's a bishop. Her farmer is first selectman in our village; she's in her dotage.  Thirsting for the hierarchie privacy of Queen Victoria's century, she buys up all the eyesores facing her shore, and lets them fall.  The season's ill-- we've lost our summer millionaire, who seemed to leap from an L. L. Bean catalogue. His nine-knot yawl was auctioned off to lobstermen. A red fox stain covers Blue Hill.  And now our fairy decorator brightens his shop for fall; his fishnet's filled with orange cork, orange, his cobbler's bench and awl; there is no money in his work, he'd rather marry.  One dark night, my Tudor Ford climbed the hill's skull; I watched for love-cars. Lights turned down, they lay together, hull to hull, where the graveyard shelves on the town. . . . My mind's not right.  A car radio bleats, "Love, O careless Love. . . ." I hear my ill-spirit sob in each blood cell, as if my hand were at its throat. . . . I myself am hell; nobody's here--  only skunks, that search in the moonlight for a bite to eat. They march on their soles up Main Street: white stripes, moonstruck eyes' red fire under the chalk-dry and spar spire of the Trinitarian Church.  I stand on top of our back steps and breathe the rich air-- a mother skunk with her column of kittens swills the garbage pail. She jabs her wedge-head in a cup of sour cream, drops her ostrich tail, and will not scare.                                                    1959 |